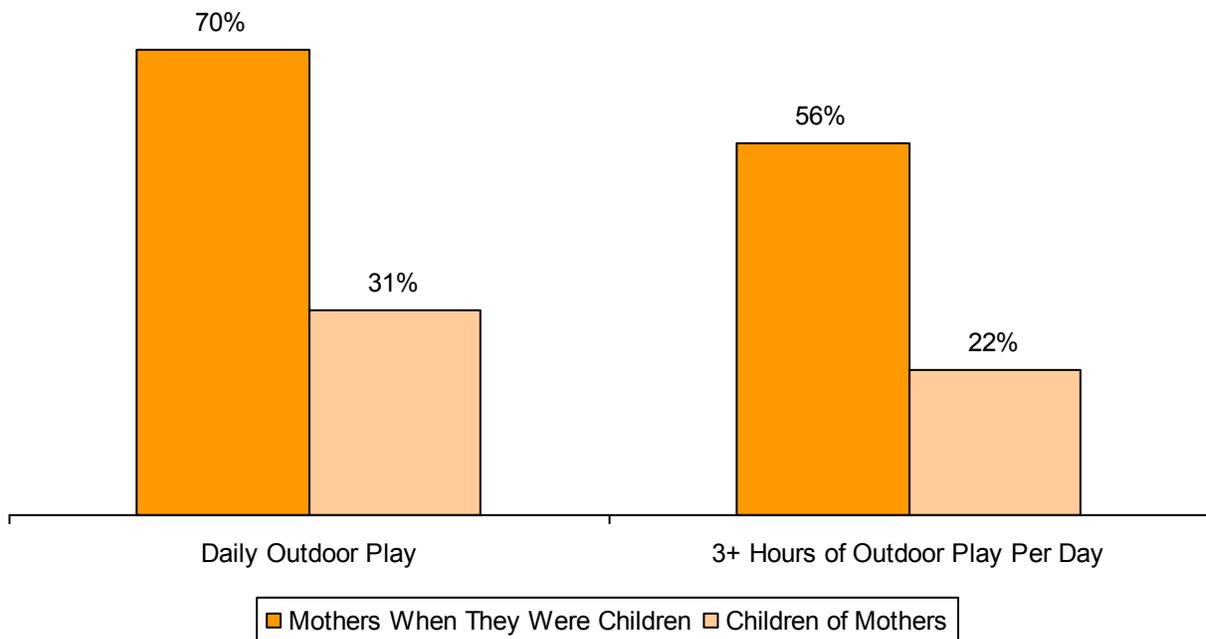


Highlights from the 2012 Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth

Is active play becoming extinct?

- Children and youth are not getting enough active play – especially outdoors. Forty-six per cent of kids are getting three hours or less of active play per week, including weekends.¹
- Children and youth are not using their “free time” for active play. School lunchtime, after school and weekends are opportune times for kids to play actively; however, 63 per cent of kids’ time after school and on weekends is spent being sedentary.² Furthermore, at lunch and after school, kids are getting only 24 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity out of a possible four hours.³
- The proportion of Canadian kids who play outside after school dropped 14 per cent over the last decade.⁴
- Active play has been on the decline for the past 50 or 60 years.⁵ Various international studies indicate parents played outside more when they were young compared to their children:



Prevalence of self-reported daily outdoor play in mothers when they were children vs. prevalence in their children (3 to 12 year olds) – U.K.⁶

1 2007-09 Canadian Health Measures Survey, Statistics Canada.

2 Garriguet D, Colley RC (2012). Daily patterns of physical activity participation in Canadians. *Health Reports*,23(2):1-6.

3 2007-09 Canadian Health Measures Survey, Statistics Canada.

4 2010 Physical Activity Monitor (PAM), Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute

5 Gray P (2011). The decline of play and the rise of psychopathology in children and adolescents. *Amer J Play*,3(4):443-63.

6 Adapted from data from Clements R (2004). An investigation of the status of outdoor play. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*,5: 68-80., U.K.

What is active play and why is it so important?

- Play comes in many forms, but it is generally freely chosen, spontaneous, self-directed and fun. It is an important part of increasing physical activity levels.
- Supporting and encouraging opportunities for safe, free, unstructured play may be one of the most promising, accessible and cost-effective solutions to increasing child and youth physical activity in Canada.
- Active play offers cognitive, emotional and social development benefits. It has been shown to improve and foster motor function, creativity, decision-making and problem-solving skills, the ability to control emotions, social skills such as taking turns and helping others, and preschoolers' speech.^{7,8}
- A study in Ontario showed that children aged three to five who play outdoors for at least two hours a day were more likely to meet physical activity guidelines.⁹
- Kids enjoy the opportunity to build, explore, create, let loose with their friends – and play. Ninety-two per cent of Canadian kids said they would choose playing with friends over watching TV.

Are screens driving children inside and to the couch?

- For the fourth year in a row, the 2012 Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card assigns an “F” for Screen-Based Sedentary Behaviour, as most Canadian children and youth are still not meeting the recommended guideline of no more than two hours a day.
- Instead of playing actively outdoors, Canadian kids in Grades 6 to 12 are spending seven hours and 48 minutes per day in front of screens.¹⁰
- The largest source of screen time is television, followed by computers and then video games.¹¹
- Boys accumulate more screen time per day than girls - almost one hour more. Although boys and girls spend similar amounts of time watching television, boys outpace girls in video game playing.¹²
- Screen time has adverse effects on physical health, health behaviours and socio-cognitive outcomes.¹³ Seated video gaming, specifically, is associated with elevated blood pressure and blood lipids,¹⁴ which are risk factors for cardiovascular disease. Additionally, in a study of students in Grades 6 to 10, video game and computer use were associated with violence such as physical fights and bullying.¹⁵

7 Brockman R, Jago R, Fox KR (2011). Children's active play: self-reported motivators, barriers and facilitators. *BMC Public Health*,11:461.

8 Singer DG, Singer JL, D'Agostino H, DeLong R (2009). Children's pastimes and play in sixteen nations: is free-play declining? *Amer J Play*,1(3):283-312.

9 Health Outcomes and Physical Activity in Preschoolers (HOPP) Study, McMaster University, Unpublished. For more information on the HOPP Study visit fhs.mcmaster.ca/chemp/preschool_hopp_study.html

10 Leatherdale ST, Ahmed R (2011). Screen-based sedentary behaviours among a nationally representative sample of youth: are Canadian kids couch potatoes? *Chronic Dis Inj Can*,31(4):141-46.

11 2009-10 Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children

12 2009-10 Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children

13 Salmon J, Tremblay MS, Marshall SJ, Hume C (2011). Health risks, correlates, and interventions to reduce sedentary behavior in young people. *Am J Prev Med*,41(2):197-206.

14 Goldfield GS, Kenny GP, Hadjiyannakis S, Phillips P, Alberga AS, Saunders TJ, Tremblay MS, Malcolm J, Prud'homme D, Gougeon R, Sigal RJ (2011). Video game playing is independently associated with blood pressure and lipids in overweight and obese adolescents. *PLoS One*,6(11):e26643.

15 Janssen I, Boyce WF, Pickett W (2012). Screen time and physical violence in 10 to 16-year-old Canadian youth. *Int J Public Health*,57(2):325-31.

Are Canadian children and youth meeting Canada's Physical Activity Guidelines?

- For the sixth year in a row, the 2012 Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card assigns an “F” to Physical Activity Levels as only seven per cent of Canadian children and youth meet the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines of at least 60 minutes of daily moderate-to vigorous-intensity physical activity.
- While achieving the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines is essential for health benefits, it is encouraging to see that most Canadian children and youth are getting some physical activity - 44 per cent of children and youth are getting 60 minutes of physical activity on three days of the week.¹⁶ However, the challenge is encouraging them to increase both the duration and frequency of their physical activity.
- Girls are still trailing the boys. Boys continue to be more physically active than girls in every age group. Twenty-eight per cent of 10- to 16-year-old boys in Canada reported accumulating at least 60 minutes of moderate-to vigorous-intensity physical activity a day compared to only 17 per cent of girls.¹⁷

Is Canadian society investing enough?

- Federal Government Strategies receives a “D” this year, which is down from a “C” in 2011. Many countries have a national strategy focused specifically on physical activity promotion – no such strategy exists in Canada. The federal government should work with the physical activity sector in Canada to complete, endorse, implement and fund a comprehensive national strategy to promote physical activity, which includes active play.
- At school, recess is increasingly being threatened by adult beliefs that this free time is better spent in academic study. More effort is required from the schools to ensure recess time is not cut and active play during this period is encouraged.
- Eighty-two per cent of mothers cite safety concerns as reasons they restrict outdoor play,¹⁸ such as crime, traffic, neighbourhood danger (i.e. bullies, rundown buildings), outdoor darkness and lack of supervision.¹⁹ Social marketing and public awareness strategies can help initiate conversations about how neighbourhoods are safer than people think they are and help parents manage their safety concerns.
- Federal Government Investments receives an “F” for the third year in a row. Though the federal government invests a large amount of money in health, only a small percentage of these funds are earmarked for health promotion (one per cent) – of these funds, only a fraction is devoted to physical activity promotion in children and youth.

16 Colley RC, Garriguet D, Janssen I, Craig CL, Clarke J, Tremblay MS (2011b). *Physical activity of Canadian children and youth: accelerometer results from the 2007 to 2009 Canadian Health Measures Survey. Health Rep,22(1):15-23.*

17 2009-10 Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children

18 Clements R (2004). *An investigation of the status of outdoor play. Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood,5: 68-80.*

19 Glenn NM, Knight CJ (2012). Children's views about the meanings of play. *WellSpring,23(1)*. URL: www.centre4activeliving.ca/publications/wellspring/2012/feb-child-play.pdf. Accessed 27 Mar 2012.

What can parents do?

- Fifty-eight per cent of Canadian parents agree they are very concerned about keeping their children safe and feel they have to be “over-protective of them in this world.”²⁰ To counter neighbourhood safety concerns, parents can take turns supervising children at play in the park or on the block, encourage kids to play outside with a buddy or advocate for traffic-calming measures such as speed bumps. Also, it is important to accept that teens and tweens need free time to play without the assumption they are “up to no good.”
- After school and on weekends are opportune times to encourage outdoor, active play. Parents should let their child decide what he/she would like to do - from dancing with friends to playing hide and seek or collecting sticks in the woods. Additionally, parents could take advantage of the large majority of schools that report students have access to outdoor facilities (89 per cent) and gyms (84 per cent) outside of school hours.²¹
- Family Physical Activity receives a “D+” this year, as very few parents appear to be physically active with their children. Parents can be a great role model by playing with their children! Only 38 per cent of parents say they often played active games with their children in the past year.²²
- Parents need to reduce screen time, keep the TV out of their child’s bedroom, institute screen time limits and encourage time spent outdoors, every day, instead of in front of the TV or playing video games.

20 IKEA (2010). *Playreport: international summary research results*. URL: www.slideshare.net/dinomondon/ikea-playreport-international-summary. Accessed 27 Mar 2012.

21 2009-11 *Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children*

22 2010 PAM, *Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute*